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C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 000911

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/ANP, DS/IP/EAP, DS/ICI/CR, DS/CR/PF, DS/IP/ITA  
AUCKLAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2014

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [SENV](#) [TSPL](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: CONVICTIONS IN NEW ZEALAND'S LARGEST PASSPORT  
FRAUD CASE

REF: WELLINGTON 605

Classified By: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COUNSELOR KATHERINE B. HADDA,  
FOR REASONS 1.5 (B,D)

[11.](#) (U) In what media reports have called the largest passport forgery case of its kind in New Zealand, two refugees to New Zealand, Iraqi Fahad Jaber AJEIL (age 29) and Kuwaiti Riyadh Hamied SULTAN (age 29), were found guilty October 21 of conspiring to commit forgery. The prosecution accused the men of producing hundreds of fraudulent passports and other falsified travel documents from 17 countries, including the United States, Liberia, Australia, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador and Yemen. During the case, investigators claimed that 50 passports or travel documents had already been delivered. In addition to conspiracy, Ajeil was also found guilty on 13 other counts, including possession of items capable of forging documents. Ajeil and Sultan will be sentenced in December.

[12.](#) (U) A third individual, Kuwaiti Dr. Salam ABU-SHAABAN was identified as the ring-leader of the forgery plot, and was named in the conspiracy charge in absentia. Although the NZ Police have not spoken with Abu-Shaaban, he contacted NZ National Radio by telephone from Kuwait. In the interview, Abu-Shaaban not only denied any involvement in a forgery ring, but also denied being Kuwaiti, claiming to be from Lebanon. Evidence of his involvement was found by the NZ Police's Metro Special Investigation unit, after they were able to translate Arabic documents found on the computers of Ajeil and Sultan. Evidence was given in the trial that Abu-Shaaban claimed to be the consul for six or seven nations, and issued passports for a number of countries, all claims that he denies.

[13.](#) (SBU) During the case the defense counsel drew parallels between the Prime Minister's handling of this case and of a recent case involving two Israeli citizens deported for attempting to falsely procure a New Zealand passport (reftel). The lawyer claimed that Prime Minister Helen Clark refused to pressure the Kuwaiti Government for information related to Abu-Shaaban due to the multi-million dollar trade in sheep with Kuwait, noting that by contrast NZ and Israel have minimal trade linkages. Defense counsel also tried to paint the men as altruistic individuals trying to provide passports for stateless Bedouins living between Iraq and Kuwait, but the prosecution dismissed this claim of charity, citing the money taken for production of the passports.

[14.](#) (C) NZ law enforcement indicated to Post that they were unable to find any ties to terrorist organizations or activities by Ajeil, Sultan and Abu-Shaaban. It is likely that the men were involved in these activities solely for personal monetary gain.  
Swindells